75.22 million hectares which is 22.8 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. The per capita forest area in the country is only 0.1 hectare whereas the world average is one hectare. Andaman and Nicobar Islands have 86.2 per cent area as recorded forests, whereas the State of Haryana is the lowest and has only 3.2 per cent of its area under forests. Various steps have been taken by the Government to stop the cutting of forests which I have explained in my earlier answer. We are continuing to step up our efforts both for stopping the illegal cutting of forests and for more vigorous afforestation programme.

SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTACHARAYA: Mr. Speaker, Sir. through you, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether recently the Government had taken a decision to empower the regional Chief Conservators of Forests with the power to clear proposals for diversion of land upto five hectares by themselves and to clear proposals for diversion of land from five to 20 hectares in consultation with the State Advisory Committee. I also what to know as to what is the composition of this Advisory. Committee; whether its capacity is purely advisory. If this is so, whether, instead of decentralisation, there would not be more concentration of power in the hands of one Central Government official and whether this would not lead to misuse of power and further decline in our forest reserve as a result of indiscriminate felling of trees.

SHRI KAMAL NATH: Sir, recently I announced in the Forest Ministers' Conference, certain decentralisation as distinct from liberalisation. The hon. Member is concerned that it may lead to unwanted destruction of forests, but there is no liberalisation, it is only to streamline the process of clearance. Until recently, only upto one hectare was permitted to be sanctioned at the regional level by the regional Chief Conservators of Forests. From the last fortnight, after the meeting of the State Forest Ministers, in consultation with them and on the basis of extensive consultations I have had with the Forest Secretaries, Principal Chief Conservators of Forests and Forest Ministers, I decided that this power, which could be done at the State Headquarters level, should be vested with the regional Chief Conservators of Forests and this power of one hectare has been made as five hectares. The hon. Member is right on that point. This relates to development projects like small water tanks etc., and where the question of five hectares to 20 hectares is concerned, the intention is that the project authorities, the State Government authorities or whatever would deal with the regional Chief Conservators of Forests who would provide input of the State Government's views on the basis of the view of an Advisory Committee which would consist of the revenue authorities, forest authorities and the project authorities. This was done because there was a complaint that it leads to a lot of time in dealing with the Central Government. This State Advisory Committee has been defined to consist of them, so that when a decision is taken, there can be no allegation of it having been taken in isolation or devoid of other aspects.

SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTACHARAYA: Is it purely of advisory capacity?

SHRI KAMAL NATH: This is to provide an input from the revenue, project authorities which otherwise could have been devoid of.

This committee would send its recommendations to the Central Advisory Committee for five hectares to twenty hectares. Up to five hectares, it is going to be done at the regional level.

MR. SPEAKER: Long, long speeches are infectious!

New Railway Lines In Vidharbha Region

*91. SHRI MUKUL BALKRISHNA WASNIK: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government had undertaken several surveys for construction of new railway lines in Vidharbha region during the last five years;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the names of projects approved for construction and the action taken so far in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MALLIKARJUN): (a) and (b). Surveys for Bhokar-Darwah Motibagh (82 km), Jalna-Khamgaon(155 Km) and Amravati-Narkher (138 km) new lines have been carried out.

(c) Amravati-Narkher has been found justified. The proposal for construction of this line is being referred to Planning Commission for their approval.

Further action would depend on approval by Planning Commission and availability of resources in the coming years.

SHRI MUKUL BALKRISHNA WASNIK: Sir, the hon. Minister in his reply has stated that the surveys for three new railway lines have been conducted in Vidharbha out of which only one railway line, Amravati-Narkher has been referred to the Planning Commission. Jalna-Khamgaon railway line for which the Minister has referred to that the survey has been conducted, is 155 km. projected railway line. ... this line would be the only railway line which would be joining the two most backward regions of Maharashtra-Vidharbha and Marathwada.

May I, therefore, know from the hon. Minister what are the criteria and what are the reasons for which this Jalna-Khamgaon railway line which will be passing through the backward region has not been referred to the Planning Commission during this current year?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: After the survey, we take into consideration the return of the line. The return of Jalna-Khamgaon (155 km.) is negative. On the contrary, for Amravati-Narkher which is 138 km. line, the return is 10.41. On that basis, it has been referred for clearance by the Planning Commission.

SHRI MUKUL BALKRISHNA WASNIK: While presenting the Railway Budget, the hon. Minister for Railways, Mr. Jaffer Sharief has stated that four new railway lines would be referred to the Planning Commission and while saying so, he has categorically mentioned that these railway lines would help development in certain most backward regions of the country. Therefore, I believe that this Government has a commitment towards development of backward regions by promoting railways and return on the railway line is not the most important criterion.

I would again like to emphasise that this Jalan-Khamgaon railway line would be passing through very backward region where there is no industry due to lack of railways, due to lack of national highway.

Would the Government reconsider to refer the Jalan-Khamgaon railway line to the Planning Commission during this current year itself?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: As I have already informed the august House, it is not possible in this year to refer this Jalan-Khamgaon railway line to the Planning Commission.

[*Translation*]

SHRI UTTAMRAO DEORAO PATIL: It has been mentioned that after survey, the Bhokar-Darwah railway line has been found unjustified although in reality, a new railway line can be laid in the place of the old route? Was this fact also taken into consideration at the time of the survey? Despite this, why this proposal has been found unjustified and rejected?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: Mr. Speaker,

Sir, the reason is that during the survey, the return was found to be minus 2.1.

Expenditure on Opening of Navodaya Vidyalayas

*92. SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the total expenditure incurred by the Government on the opening of Navodaya Vidyalayas in the country out of the total budget earmarked for education every year during each of the last three years;

(b) the number of children from below poverty line admitted in these Vidyalayas during the above period, State-wise;

(c) the average expenditure incurred per year on a student of Navodaya Vidyalaya;

(d) the number of posts of teachers lying vacant in Navodaya Vidyalayas, State-wise; and

(e) the steps taken or proposed to be taken for filling up these posts?

[English]

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ARJUN SINGH): (a) to (e). A statement is laid on the Table of the Sabha.

STATEMENT

The total expenditure incurred on Navodaya Vidyalayas vis-a-vis the total Central Budget for education during the last three years is as follows:

Year	*Total Grant Released to NVS Plant*	*Total education (Central) budget(both Plan & Non-*
1988-89	79.30 crores	1581.86 crores
1989-90	80.78 crores	1578.42 crores
1990-91	100.38 crores	1710.49 crores

Year-wise average expenditure per student incurred during the lat 3 years, excluding cost of construction, is as follows:

Year	*Average expenditure per student*
1988-89	Rs.9,582.00
1989-90	Rs.8,499.00
1990-91	Rs. 7,474.00

No statistics about the students admitted from families below the poverty line are maintained. However, according to information gathered from 223 Navodaya Vidyalayas in 1989-90, about 40% of students came from families with an income below Rs. 6000/- per annum.

The filling up of vacancies as they arise from time to time is a continuous process. Concerted efforts including advertisement through leading Newspapers/ Employment News are made to fill them us on regular basis. However, the Principals concerned have been authorised to fill up the vacant posts on ad-hoc/part-time basis in order to avoid loss of studies of the students.